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Pryor's Truths

By Lee Ballinger

Richard Pryor died on Decem ber 10, aged 65. From the October 2000 issue of *Rock & Rap Confidential*: "You should not even get on stage and attempt to be funny", Chris Rock said recently, "unless you realize you're never going to be as funny as Richard Pryor."

Anyone who doubts the truth of that statement is referred to *...And It's Deep Too! The Complete Richard Pryor Warner Brothers Recordings* (1968-1992), a nine-CD box set just out on Rhino. Especially on the three complete concerts included, Pryor is revealed as not just the funniest man who ever lived, but an actor, a mimic, and a student of American history with few peers as well.

What gets lost in all the hoopla about Pryor's brilliant routines about sex and drugs is that he's also the most incisive political entertainer we've ever had. Unlike today's phony "political" comedians like Bill Maher, Richard Pryor took sides. He was always with the poor against the rich. Above all, he hated the police, whom he saw as inherently vile and brutal. He could sum up complicated realities in a heartbeat: "The Japanese sent people to UCLA and UC Berkeley. There wouldn't have been no Pearl Harbor if they had sent people to the University of Alabama or the University of Mississippi."

Pryor's relentless spotlight on hypocrisy was presented as a challenge to be met, not just cynical poking in an open wound. On a disc of outtakes here, *That African-American's Crazy: Good Shit From the Vaults*, Pryor tells in hushed tones of a conversation with God, who has asked to see Emmett Till. Pryor has to tell God that Till was lynched in 1957. God gasps, takes a step back, and murmurs, "But he was such a good young man."

"Well, then," God finally says, "I'd like to see my son. How's my kid doing?" CP

Bush, a Year Later

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

Was there ever a president in worse shape a year after reelection than George Bush? Nixon, maybe. Was there ever a president more fortunate in the quality of the party opposing him? Bush wins that one in a walk. These days the only Democrat who sounds like Sam Ervin is John Murtha, and if his fellow Democrats had cold-shoulderd Ervin the way they have Murtha, Nixon would have served out his second term.

The list of Bush's adversities scarcely needs repeating. On every front he's in trouble: the unpopularity of the war; the onslaught by fellow Republicans on the rendition flights and secret torture centers; the humiliation of Condoleezza Rice in Europe; the abandonment of New Orleans amid the surfacing of more incriminating e-mail traffic from the White House in the early days of the emergency. Even Haley Barbour, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said in early December that the Bush administration was failing to live up to its obligations.

Each week brings fresh omens of unpopularity. Not everyone opens the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, but everyone looks at their utility bill and for those using natural gas the Christmas tidings are that it's going to cost consumers on average more than $300 over and above last year's bill to heat their homes this winter.

Larger troubles loom. Outgoing chairman of the Fed Greenspan, broods out loud about the deficit and the air hissing out of the housing bubble. A CounterPuncher in Georgetown in Washington D.C., reports that For Sale signs that went up in the early fall are still there.

In the second week in December *Business Week* took a look at Loudoun county, 30 miles southeast (made one word) of the nation's capital, which has been the hottest real estate market in the country since 2000.The median sales price went from $506,000 to $480,000 in just two months. The average time houses stay on the market has increased by 62 per cent and is now at 42 days. Three For Sale signs go up for every two taken down. Spec developers are offering $10,000-plus discounts on new homes.

Nationwide, *The Economist* reports that prices for new homes rose by only 1 per cent in the fiscal year ending in October of 2005. The previous 12 months saw a rise of 16 per cent. Unsold homes increased by 25 per cent.

We asked CounterPuncher Robert Pollin, professor of economics at U Mass, Amherst, for his take on the likely bust . His ominous response:

"The U.S. housing bubble began in earnest with the collapse of the stock market bubble in 2000, as investors, including foreign investors, moved their funds into housing as opposed to stocks. What will be the effects of the end of the bubble? If housing prices fall sharply, as is possible (as opposed to a "soft landing"), it could threaten the viability of Fannie May and Freddie Mac. These are two of the largest financial institutions in the U.S. and the world, and they are leveraged up to their teeth in mortgages, the collateral for which will collapse right along with the decline in housing prices.

Homeowners have also been borrowing against their newfound housing wealth to sustain high levels of consumption, and that too will decline. A real estate market collapse will not be pretty: Japan has yet

(**Bush** *continued on page 9)*

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What People Endure in This Country 50 Years after Rosa Parks

Your Papers, Please

By Ann Harrison

Deborah Davis, a 50-year-old mother of four, was riding the bus to work one morning in Denver when she discovered what happens to citizens who insist on their right to travel.

A security guard boarded Davis' public bus and demanded that all passengers show their ID. This was not the first time Davis had been asked to produce identification en route to work. The Route 100 bus transits through the Denver Federal Center that includes the offices of the Veterans Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, and part of the National Archives.

The Denver Federal Center is not a high security area, and Davis' ID was not compared against a "no ride" list. But the incident bothered Davis because she knew from her high school civics class that there is no law requiring American citizens to carry an ID or produce it on demand.

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which oversees federal police, passenger ID checks on Route 100 began after the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City. But forcing U.S. citizens to show an ID is a search without a warrant. It's also an ineffective security tool. Faked and stolen IDs are commonplace.

On this particular morning in late September, Davis decided that she was going to uphold her constitutional rights. When asked, she refused to show the guard her ID. He ordered her off the bus, but she refused explaining that she was simply trying to get to work.

The guard summoned a federal police officer who repeated the orders. Davis again refused and declined to hang up a phone call she had placed to a friend. "The whole thing seemed to be more about compliance than security," Davis told the *Denver Post*.

What happened next is an example of what people like Davis endure in this country fifty years after Rosa Parks took her stand on a public bus. The police officer shouted, "Grab her!" and snatched the cell phone from her hand. He threw the phone to the back of the bus and, with the other officer, jerked Davis to her feet. They dragged her out of the bus, handcuffed her, shoved her into the back seat of a police car, and drove her to a police station inside the Federal Center.

The policemen tried to figure out what to charge Davis with and finally ended up writing several tickets. They then removed her handcuffs, directed her to the bus stop, and told her that if she ever entered the Denver Federal Center again, she would be arrested.

The Identity Project and the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado immediately arranged to provide Davis with free legal representation. My brother, Jim Harrison, is one of several attorneys who stood ready to represent Davis at her scheduled arraignment in U.S. District Court in Denver on December 9. Davis was expected to be charged with federal criminal misdemeanors involving admission to property and conformity to official signs and directions. Davis, whose son is fighting in Iraq to allegedly defend American values, faced up to sixty days in jail.

But on December 7, the government dropped all charges against Davis. They claim that passengers still have to show ID to transit through the Denver Federal Center, but said there were no clear signs to inform them of this requirement.

Davis' lawyers are not going away. Her arrest gives them standing to sue the federal government for false arrest. Her attorneys are now negotiating with federal officials to prevent the ID requirement from being enforced on Denver city buses.

"We are very pleased that they dropped charges against Ms. Davis," her volunteer attorney Gail Johnson told *The Rocky Mountain News*. "But sign or no sign, she and other Colorado citizens continue to have the constitutional right to travel by public bus without being forced to show identification to federal agents. I think if the government is going to insist on continuing to violate the constitutional rights of our citizens, then they are going to find themselves back in court on this one."

On December 8, my brother argued another right to travel case before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of John Gilmore.

I was with Gilmore on July 4, 2002, when he attempted to fly out of San Francisco International Airport without showing an ID. When Gilmore asked to see the law demanding that he "show his papers", he was told that the law was secret.

Secret law is an abomination. Gilmore has asked the courts to rein in this overreach of the executive branch. But a lower court has already ruled that Gilmore has no standing to challenge the ID requirement and rejected his assertion that the right to travel is supported by the First Amendment right to assemble and Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable search.

The appellate court decision in Gilmore's case will show whether the judiciary is willing to enforce laws that don't exist and ignore the constitutional rights of brave people like Deborah Davis. CP

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Indian Exodus from Southern Mexico Divides California Day Labor

By John Ross

As the migration stream from the impoverished, heavily indigenous south of Mexico thickens, San Francisco's long-lived day labor market has undergone a sea change.

As in many U.S. cities from New York to California, each morning undocumented Mexican laborers line up along 12 blocks of the appropriately named Cesar Chavez Boulevard bordering the city's Latino barrio waiting for off-the-books day jobs from drive-by employers. Despite periodic crackdowns by immigration authorities (although San Francisco is a sanctuary city), the day labor market has persisted for nearly a decade now, and the temporary workers have even affiliated with a union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 790, which has helped them to set a $10 an hour floor for their labor.

But in 2005 the Chavez boulevard shape-up is limited to veteran workers, almost all of them "Mestizos" (mixed race) who hail from central Mexican feeder states like Michoacan, Jalisco, and Guanajuato.

Meanwhile, a second tier of day laborers, mostly recent arrivals from southern Mexico and often of Indian descent have set up shop on an adjoining street. The men waiting for prospective employers along that strip readily concede that they work for $8 an hour, below the San Francisco minimum wage and two bucks less than their counterparts out on Chavez boulevard but incalculably more than they would get for a day's work back home in the poor farming communities from which they hail.

The wage differential has sparked hostilities between the two labor markets, which troubles Local 790 organizer Frank Martin del Campo: "the new arrivals need to get together and refuse to work for anything but $10 an hour."

On a grim Veterans Day morning (U.S. holidays confuse undocumented workers), a handful of men gathered on the corner of South Van Ness and 26th in the city's Mission district. Were they from Chiapas, a Mexico-based reporter asked? "No, Veracruz and Oaxaca", a robust "paisano" laughed. The "Chiapanecos" (those from Chiapas) were further down the block. "Subcomandante Marcos", the man joked, referring to the Mayan rebels' legendary spokesperson, "is over there with them".

The four young men leaning against parked cars down the block were in fact from a village on the perimeter of the Lacandon jungle - Pena Limonar in the municipality of Ocosingo, birthplace of the now-celebrated Zapatista rebellion. Pena Limonar is a Tzeltal Mayan speaking outpost in the savannas between the jungle and the ancient ruins at Palenque where power is begrudgingly shared by Zapatistas, supporters of the once-ruling PRI party, and an independent farmers organization initialed ARIC. The town falls within the jurisdiction of the embattled Zapatista autonomous municipality named for the old anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon.

The collapse of world coffee prices has forced tens of thousands of mostly Indian growers in southern Mexico to abandon their patches and head north.

The number of indigenous men and women in the immigration mix has escalated in recent years, the bitter fruit of tumbling coffee and corn prices in Mexico's Indian south. Mayans from two tiny Yucatan villages are the fastest-growing community in San Francisco's Mission district. Now the Chiapanecos are arriving in substantial numbers.

The men of Limonar first came to "San Pancho" about five years ago and now there are perhaps 50 of them here, estimates "Bartolo" (not his real name), a strapping 24-year-old day worker who showed up three months ago. The men (there are no women in the group) have come to one of the highest rent cities in the known universe from thatched huts in the Lacandon jungle – 20 of the "Chiapanecos" cram into a Mission district apartment.

The men say they are not Zapatistas – their fathers are members of the PRI and the ARIC – but the Zapatistas are their neighbors and "they are good people" reckons Bartolo. The Zapatistas do not migrate north, preferring to stay rooted on the land, and those rebels who do leave are reportedly ostracized in their home villages.

Most of the young men from Limonar paid a heavy price to get to San Pancho – $2,000 (for a "coyote" to get them across the border east of Tijuana. "We walked in the desert for a week", recalls "Abraham", a thin 23-year-old man with two infant children back home. Limonar is so far off the grid that his wife has to walk two hours to the nearest phone when he calls home.

"Abraham" gets work "three or four days a week" but complains that the "Chinos" (Chinese) who hire the men for yard work or home repair will only pay $8 an hour. "We have to accept it or else our families back home will go hungry."

Why had these young Mayan men uprooted themselves from their families, risked danger and death as they traveled thousands of miles across the length of Mexico and California to lean against parked cars in the Mission, waiting for an occasional, below-minimum wage job? "Our fathers are farmers" "Dionicio", also from Limonar, tries to explain, "I don 't know how exactly to say this in Spanish – we speak our own dialect (Tzeltal is a fully developed language system, not a "dialect") – but they cannot get a price for their corn and their coffee now. Here we at least make some money to send home to our families." As the northern California winter looms and home construction work diminishes, the men from Limonar are discussing heading to hurricane-devastated New Orleans where there is reportedly much work for undocumented laborers.

The collapse of world coffee prices

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and the flood of cheap, subsidized U.S. corn into Mexico under NAFTA is driving southern Mexico's Indian farmers off the land and into the immigration stream north. According to recent round-up stats released by Homeland Security's Immigration Control Enforcement (ICE) division, deportees from Chiapas led the charge from southern Mexico in fiscal 2004-2005.

In many cities like Palenque, from which the young Tzeltales headed north, there are "travel agencies" now – really just one rusting bus that leaves weekly for the border. The first stop is El Altar in northern Sonora, just a step away from the Arizona desert in which so many *indocumentados* perish – more than 200 died out there last year. Tijuana is the end of the line, and the men had connected with their high-price "coyote" there. The deal had been arranged in Palenque.

The collapse of world coffee prices has forced tens of thousands of mostly Indian growers in southern Mexico to abandon their patches and head north – the men waiting for work down the street from the Chiapanecos were from Veracruz and Oaxaca, both coffee producing states, and were similarly driven. In 2002, 14 undocumented workers from a Veracruz coffee town died out in the Arizona desert, and last year two young men from Ocosingo came home in cheap coffins. Two more cut down in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina were recently buried in a neighboring village.

Corn production is similarly under attack in Mexico's south as the U.S.A. dumps 6,000,000 tons of the grain over the border each year, much of it genetically modified. U.S. corn is generously subsidized, with corporate growers receiving as much as $21,000 an acre from Washington, allowing them to sell to Mexico below cost.

By 2008, under NAFTA schedules, corn tariffs will be eliminated entirely. The Tzeltales in San Francisco are Mayan Indians whose sacred book, the *Popol Vuh*, designates them as "the People of the Corn."In the 13 years since NAFTA was signed by the first Bush back in 1992, nearly 5,000 Mexicans, many of them displaced farmers, have died trying to cross into the U.S.A. to get a job no one else will take. The young Mayan men standing on 26th street in the Mission waiting for a job have thus far been spared. CP

John Ross lives in Mexico City. His most recent book is *Murdered By Capitalism*.

Meet Rahm Emmanuel: The Republicans' Secret Weapon

By Andrew Cockburn

At a recent meeting of House Republicans, members ruminating on the disastrous state of their party reportedly murmured with gloomy jocularity about the administration of "President Hastert". A CounterPuncher familiar with the proceedings reports, "they were only half joking".

Yet, as they contemplate political ruin in next year's election, these Republicans can take solace in the fact that, if defeated, their replacements may not differ in any meaningful way on important issues of the day. That, at least, is the hope and dream of Democratic apparatchik Rahm Emmanuel and the corporate toadies he represents.

Emmanuel, a relict of the Clinton White House, heads the Democratic National Campaign Committee. As such, he decides which candidates for the House should get money and other support from the national party. At a time when any fool can see that the public hates the war more this month than last, and will hate it even more next month, and the month after that, Emmanuel is doing his best to recruit candidates, preferably rich ones, guaranteed to eschew vocal opposition to the war.

Clear evidence for this proclivity is evident in the race to succeed Henry Hyde in Chicago's 6th District. In the last election, progressive candidate Christine Cegelis actually got 44.2 per cent of the vote against the sixteen-term Hyde, despite being outspent $700,000 to $160,000 in a conservative district with no elected Democrats at all. Following this commendable showing, Cegelis figured that with Hyde retiring and the Republicans melting down she stood a better than even chance of garnering the seat in 2006.

However it seems that in Emmanuel's opinion, Cegelis stinks. Never mind that excellent record against the giant Hyde, forget her well-crafted support network in the Chicago district, Cegelis has not yet raised a million dollars and, even more damningly, she is calling for troop withdrawal from Iraq. So Emmanuel set out to recruit a more suitable candidate. Initially, he approached two millionaires and urged them, serially, to run against Cegelis in the primary. They refused. Now he is pinning his hopes on a double amputee Iraq veteran, Tammy Duckworth.

Duckworth, who is not from the district, has ignited hopes at the DNCC headquarters that she would campaign on a "pro-business/centrist platform". Queried by a *Chicago Sun Times* columnist for her opinion on the war, she replied, "There's good and bad in everything."

That sort of equivocation must certainly have commended her to Emmanuel, who greeted Congressman Murtha's fervent and well-informed denunciation of the war with the words, "Jack Murtha went out and spoke for Jack Murtha," and has declared that "At the right time we will have a position" on the war. Cegelis' position is clear: "I support Jack Murtha", she tells CounterPunch. "If Jack Murtha is calling for withdrawal, then I go with that."

If Emmanuel and his like succeed in displacing Cegelis and similar candidates, thereby undercutting any claim the Democrats might have to either principle or votes, he will only be concluding the work he began in the 1990s.

Cegelis reports that the economy has become the key issue in DuPage County, roughly coterminous with the district. "DuPage has lost jobs for the first time in fifty years." As manufacturing jobs disappear to Mexico or China, voters can mull the benefits of free trade and the Democrats who fostered it.

Most clear-minded observers would agree that among the mortal body blows that have brought the Democrats to their present ebb, the passage of NAFTA in 1993, with consequent evisceration of the American industrial economy, must count as among the most lethal.

Key to that passage was Emmanuel, who directed the Clinton White House operation to get the treaty passed by any means necessary. The inevitable consequences of misery and want inflicted on Americans and Mexicans alike did not of course hinder his career, which took him, following his departure from the White House in 1998, to a well upholstered post in a Chicago banking firm before he won election to Dan Rostenkowski's old Chicago seat. Now, with the Democrats presented by their opponents with their best chance in years, Emmanuel is ready to ensure that, come what may, nothing will really change, except for the worse. CP

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The Council on Foreign Relations Does AIDS

By Ed Krales

In July, 2005, on the fifth anniversary of the U.N. Security Council resolution addressing the threat HIV/AIDS poses to the security of nations, the Council on Foreign Relations published Laurie Garrett's study entitled "HIV and National Security: Where Are the Links?"

Garrett, "senior fellow for global health" at the CFR, addresses with problems not usually considered by HIV/AIDS workers and policy makers. Some of the topics she deals with are how the Black Death changed the political and social structure of Europe; the role of armed forces and UN peacekeepers in spreading HIV; how states are destabilized and the effect their instability has on the rest of the world; and Bush's "President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief". There is much technical information in the report but also many omissions and inaccurate assumptions.

Garrett outlines ideas on how to fight AIDS, minimizing the security threat faced by affected nations. Her prime concern is protecting police and the military from drug-resistant forms of the virus. Her secondary concern is tracking those people she considers responsible for spreading it.

Garrett's central recommendation: "Of all the tools of prevention, the only one likely to stop the pandemic is an effective vaccine." Thinking that finding a vaccine will save us assumes free or very low-cost distribution. But complete access is contrary to capitalist policies. The US, World Bank, WTO and IMF block full access to effective therapies available rightnow.

Consider the ongoing tuberculosis crisis. Dr. Paul Farmer's 2003 book *Pathologies of Power* emphasizes that "tuberculosis *deaths* now—which number in the millions—occur almost exclusively among the poor, whether they reside in the inner cities of the United States or in the poor countries of the Southern Hemisphere. Many would find it scandalous that one of the world's leading causes of preventable adult deaths is a disease that, with the possible exception of emerging resistant strains, is more than 95 percent curable with inexpensive therapies developed decades ago."

We know how to stop several forms of HIV transmission. One of them, called mother to child transmission (MTCT) uses an inexpensive technique that is very effective. First, it is important to understand that newborns can't be breastfed by an HIV-positive mother or they too may become HIV positive. Clean water has to be provided with powdered baby formula. If unsafe water is used, babies could die from water-borne diseases faster than if they had HIV. Do we know how to make enough clean water in all locales? Yes. Do we do it? No.

Invention of an AIDS vaccine would be no guarantee that people who needed it would get it. Big pharmaceutical companies are getting rich on AIDS. Producing and distributing an inexpensive vaccine runs counter to their motivation – profit.

The problem with the US government's "reliable" ways to avoid AIDS infection is that they don't work unless you live on the Moon, alone.

Garrett describes how DNA fingerprinting can show where different strains of HIV are located. She says the oldest viral sample was found in blood stored in the Congo in 1959. Today there are many different groups called "clades" that have mutated from the original virus. It's possible to know where a particular infection came from, and whether it developed locally or was imported. We know if infections were caused by injection, sexual transmission or another route. Injected virus doesn't need to mutate greatly to integrate itself into a new body. What the DNA fingerprinting can't tell us is whether the substance injected is illegal. It can't tell us if contaminated blood was transfused or if invasive medical equipment was properly sterilized. It can't tell us if a criminal act was committed.

Garrett makes two errors concerning DNA fingerprinting. The first concerns the heroin-trading routes from Burma. She points out that HIV infection follows poppy-growing and heroin-smuggling routes from Burma. "The genetic HIV evidence is a smoking gun fingering Burma. The Burmese HIV contribution to much of Asia poses a clear security threat to the region." Garrett also tells us that Burma was the world's number one opium producer until US-occupied Afghanistan took over that ignoble position in 2003. Garrett doesn't draw the implications of US-occupied Afghanistan producing 87 per cent of the world's opium nor of so many police, military and government officials profiting from the trade.

The US is in a unique position to undermine heroin smuggling and use and dramatically reduce the HIV in its tow. It can buy heroin and sell it to users at prices below cost. This will drive any competitor out of business. When users come into the "government dairy" to buy their goods, they can be provided with a hot meal, clean needles and works. Nurses can give instructions on sterile injection methods and provide other health needs. Harm reduction, safe sex, and detoxification-rehabilitation programs can be offered. Rapid

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HIV testing and counseling can be done. Those who test positive can be offered treatment. The success of such a program could reach all the way to Colombia, where the US "war on drugs" is a costly failure and merely a cover for interfering in Columbia's civil war.

Garrett's second medical forensic error concerns the HIV caught by peacekeepers. She says, "Uruguayan members of the UN peacekeeping force stationed in Cambodia acquired a unique A/E recombinant form of the virus and then passed it along upon return to Uruguay. This verified that the Uruguayan peacekeepers were engaged in misconduct and presented concern for the security of their home nation upon their return. "

The form of HIV disease that the Uruguayan soldiers caught does not verify wrongdoing. It only shows that the soldiers did not use appropriate sanitation when using needles or other invasive medical equipment, or that they used local contaminated blood or blood products.

When people think of dirty needles, they usually think of illegal drugs. This isn't necessarily the case. When proper sanitation isn't used, injecting insulin, vitamin B12, or anything – legal or illegal – may transmit HIV. Tattooing done with a dirty needle may spread the virus, no matter how lovely the image produced. The form of HIV disease that the Uruguayan soldiers may transmit shows that some of the peacekeepers do not practice safe sex. Whether or not that sex is homosexual, heterosexual, free of charge or paid for, it is not criminal unless it isn't consensual and with an adult.

Rapists and pedophiles must be prosecuted as criminals. But criminalizing possible drug use and then tracking the "criminals" isn't going to help defeat the pandemic. What criminalizing will do is provide the justification to attack various countries in the name of "justice" or continue to fill jails with HIV-positive drug users.

The right approach is not to criminalize people with HIV but to teach them how to enjoy themselves without getting hurt. We have to teach people to adopt a self-protective attitude about sex and drugs. No matter how hard religious fundamentalists try, they will not be able to stamp out the fun of recreational sex and getting high. People enjoy sex and drugs.

Garrett's CFR report abounds in wrong conclusions. It's not possible to address them all without writing an equally long piece. But the errors that do need to be discussed are U.S. AIDS policy in general and one of its principle manifestations, the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

The CFR is right. People have the right not to become infected. Of course prevention of any disease is always better than treatment or cure, even if it is less profitable. They also have the right to adequate care if they do become HIV positive. Unfortunately, U.S. AIDS policy at home and PEPFAR around the world don't follow these principles. PEPFAR is a 9-billion-dollar, 5-year program that is helping 15 developing countries fight AIDS. It's based on U.S. domestic AIDS policy. The U.S.A. presents its advice on HIV/AIDS prevention for domestic consumption on the CDC website. From the section "Preventing HIV Infection" comes the following: "The most reliable ways to avoid becoming infected with or transmitting HIV are:

• Abstain from sexual intercourse (i.e., oral, vaginal, or anal sex).

• Be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.

• Abstain from sharing needles and/or syringes for non-prescription drugs."

The problem with these "reliable" ways to avoid infection is that they don't work unless you live on the moon, alone. Half of all new U.S. infections occur in people between the ages of 16 to 24. Those youths aren't looking for "long-term, mutually monogamous relationships". They just want to have sex. The Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing of 9/16/03 told us that sex between an unmarried man and woman was "Morally Acceptable" to 54 per cent of all Americans and 69 per cent of those 18 to 24.

If money is not available to buy new needles, people use old ones over and over again, even if they aren't sterilized properly. Sharing contaminated needles or syringes to inject prescription drugs will spread the infection just as effectively as using illegal drugs.

Using condoms is mentioned as a secondary suggestion in the CDC piece. *The Body,* an online AIDS magazine (www.TheBody.com), included in its September/October 2005 issue an article by Jim Pickett entitled "Pickett Fences: Squat Close to the Load." Pickett wrote that over 3,000 participants at the recent 2005 National HIV Prevention Conference were given manuals titled "Safety". The manuals had great information on lifting heavy loads, which has nothing to do with AIDS, but not a word about condoms. Maybe it's a lot easier to deal with AIDS if you don't have a hernia.

In the U.S.A., the medieval, fundamentalist approach makes controlling AIDS difficult. But the situation is much worse for developing countries that have to rely on PEPFAR for material support. PEPFAR goes further than the CDC. It mandates $3 billion to be spent on abstinence-only programs. On October 18, 2005, *The Baltimoresun.com* published Paula Tavrow's "Undermining the AIDS Fight". She wrote, "The U.N. special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis, (declared that the administration's policy of emphasizing abstinence-only programs and cutting federal funding for condoms has undermined Uganda's HIV/AIDS effort. Sadly, Uganda is not alone."

Paddy Luzige, Senior Pastor/Overseer of the New Life Church in Kampala, Uganda, gave a talk at Saint Vincent's Catholic Medical Center's AIDS Education Grand Rounds last October. He brought into focus the depth of the failure of the U.S. program of AIDS relief in Africa. He insisted that he is not against condom use or any other effective technique to stop the spread of the virus. In fact, he wants to see education accompany condom distribution. Luzige emphasized that there are 52 tribes in Uganda, each with its own culture. He described cultural practices that could have direct impact on spreading AIDS. For example, a father must have sex with his son's new bride, and a young man should have sex with a married woman in order to leave his "poverty seeds" with her so that

The more U.S. dollars accepted, the greater the increase in AIDS and in Brazil's death rate

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he can become rich. Sex with a woman right after male circumcision completes that ritual.

Obviously, education about condom use in these situations would cut down on HIV transmission. Luzige thinks that tales of Uganda's "success" fighting AIDS are false. These stories arose because there are few sick people in the cities. Once people become ill, they are taken back to their native villages to be cared for.

Thailand sharply reduced its incidence of AIDS by using a condom promotion program as part of its campaign. Garrett's CFR report omits to mention that an important part of the world-renowned Cuban AIDS prevention and control program is condom use.

As if the primitive U.S. program is not destructive enough, in June 2005 Bush buckled on his "chastity belt" and declared that anyone receiving U.S. funds must oppose sex trafficking and prostitution. In order not to lose funds to fight AIDS, a recipient has to stop teaching sex workers of either gender to adopt safe sex practices. They can't distribute condoms to their coworkers and clients and must stop being proponents of "HIV stops here". Sex workers must be further marginalized in order to satisfy official U.S. moral precepts.

In Africa, U.S. money has been donated to "faith communities" that know nothing about fighting the spread of HIV. The infection rate continues to rise and may even have been accelerated because additional U.S. dollars allow these faith communities to reach more people with more ineffective information.

To its credit, the Brazilian government said No to U.S. funds. Brazil said Bush's policies would undermine its attempts to control the spread of HIV. Brazil underlined this conviction by sending back the $40 million in "AIDS aid."

The Brazilians are saying that acceptance of U.S. "aid" – because of its primitive, unscientific and anti-sexual approach to a primarily sexually transmitted disease – actually results in an increase in the spread of the disease. The more U.S. dollars accepted, the greater the increase in AIDS and in Brazil's death rate. According to actionaidusa.org, Dr. Paul Zeitz, DO, MPH, Director of the Global AIDS Alliance, declared that, "In turning down the U.S. grant, the Government of Brazil is actually protecting people at risk by ensuring science-based preventions are implemented rather than ideologically-based preventions that have no basis in scientific reality. This is a phenomenal development by Brazil, a sovereign government which is finally standing up against policies that are doing more harm than good."

In the U.S., the lack of resolution to defeat Bush's program is mortifying. But don't get too comfortable with the idea that this state of affairs is all the fault of George 2. The strings attached to U.S. aid money won't disappear when the next U.S. president/emperor takes office. Every administration has its own strings attached to foreign aid. Remember the Clinton administration's threats against South Africa if it dared to produce generic anti-AIDS medication. Clinton also blocked passage of a domestic needle-exchange bill. If the bill had passed, thousands of lives would have been saved. Bush merely incorporated Clinton's domestic needle dogma into PEPFAR.

The CFR calls for an "increase in donor support for the Global Fund and other mechanisms aimed at reducing the spread of HIV and treating AIDS in poor countries." But how will increasing money spent on policies that actually spread HIV end the pandemic?

The Bush administration and the Democratic Party are driven by the ideology of profit, not medical science. The CFR is likewise dedicated to corporate globalization. Its report repeats the fantasy that the wealthy world has an interest in starting "development programs aimed at bringing the poor world into the global economy, from which it may eventually derive sufficient wealth to absorb the costly exigencies of AIDS". This statement ignores the broader issue of resource availability and use. The U.S.A. with 5 per cent of the world's population uses 27 per cent of its resources. Add the resource-use of the G8 and other rich countries, and what is left for the developing world to get rich on? The CFR also ignores the procedure that the wealthy world follows when it invites a country into its "parlor". When India was invited into the WTO, a condition was to stop generic medication production. (See "The Origin of AIDS: An Ethical Inquiry," CounterPunch.org/krales04112005.html.)

The CFR writes that treatment and medication "must be a priority in highly afflicted states" and warns us that social unrest could develop if these were only available to the "valued elite human resources". Unrealistically, the CFR appeals to the people who actively block access to HIV meds, to provide them for everyone.

AIDS wasn't created by a conspiracy of corporate scientists bent on destroying blacks, gays and drug users. Once AIDS appeared, however, it is naïve to think that it did not become part of the arsenal of weapons used by the developed world in its continued domination of the rest of the planet. People have been dominated many times in the past through food and water control, so why not use AIDS?

What is the point of Garrett's CFR report? After describing the changes in the Catholic Church and feudalism caused by the Black Plague, it doesn't describe what might happen in the developing world under the shroud of AIDS. The comparison isn't made because the CFR defines a nation's security as maintaining the climate for the U.S. to do business. The human horror of AIDS is of little concern. Therefore, the solutions promoted to defeat AIDS will maintain profits and provide a stable business atmosphere if or when some developing countries fail. The U.S. will be able to gain police and military loyalty in failed states by providing life-saving drugs. The CFR is part of the class struggle and wants to contribute to its victory.

What could happen is that the U.S., WTO, WB, IMF and G8 will continue to offer "aid" to fight AIDS. Once they move in to administer the aid, it will be very hard to get them out. Tens of millions of people will be too busy trying to stay alive to organize a fight-back. If the U.S. cabal succeeds, the developing world will become a loading dock from which to send all its wealth to the developed world. Its many and varied cultures will be replaced by the monoculture of capitalism. "Disneyland" will be built, enclosed by fences for U.S., European, or other corporate managers, their families and guest workers. Sprawling ghettos will surround the fenced-in areas. The local police and military will have access to AIDS meds. The rest of the people will be forced to battle AIDS any way they can. Bill Gates, Bill Clinton and others will provide humanitarian relief for a tiny minority but won't interfere with corporate plans. Eventually people will see that capitalism, not AIDS, is *the* disease. Profit is its principle opportunistic infection.

In reality, we know what to do to begin to defeat AIDS. At "FORO 2003," the 2nd forum on HIV/AIDS/STD in Latin America and Caribbean, in Havana, Ms. Debrework Zewdie, the World Bank's Caribbean regional representative, suggested

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that the developing world adopt Cuba's medical model as the strategy for fighting the pandemic. (See "Cuba's Response to AIDS: Model for the Developing World," Counterpuch.org/krales11112004.html.) Unfortunately, almost three years have passed, and the World Bank has still not financed this project. What we must do is:

• Fully fund the Cuban medical model and use it worldwide.

• Restore local agriculture and build clean-water facilities. Without the "Big Three" – air, water and food – medication is worthless.

• Take back from the pharmaceutical companies all HIV-medication production rights, beginning with the anti-AIDS drugs that were publicly developed, such as didanosine, stavudine and zalcitabine. New HIV meds are being developed using public funds. But as long as the manufacturing is done in secret and the marketing rights are given to private pharmaceutical companies, we won't be able to provide medication to all the people who need it.

• Produce generic medications in facilities all over the world to ensure that local needs are met.

• Expand the global medication-recycling program now in existence so that no useful medication is wasted until enough is produced generically.

These steps aren't possible under U.S. leadership. The CFR wants to speed up its failed policies, but moving in the wrong direction never leads to the right destination no matter how fast you go.

We must unshackle ourselves from the interests of the corporate world. We need to build a grand coalition inside the U.S.A. and around the world that is interested in promoting public health, not private profits. CP

Edwin Krales is an HIV/AIDS nutritionist and health educator in New York City.

John Lennon Speaks: On Vietnam, "Revolution" and Black Power

Editors' Note: It was twenty-five years ago that John Lennon was murdered outside the Dakota building on Central Park West in New York City. We doubt many CounterPunchers have read the following 1971 interview with Lennon done by CounterPunchers Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn. The interview ran in The Red Mole, a Trotskyist sheet put out by the British arm of the Fourth International and is included in Tariq Ali's Streetfighting Years, recently published by Verso.

John Lennon: I've always been politically minded, you know, and against the status quo. It's pretty basic when you're brought up, like I was, to hate and fear the police as a natural enemy and to despise the army as something that takes everybody away and leaves them dead somewhere.

I mean, it's just a basic working class thing, though it begins to wear off when you get older, get a family and get swallowed up in the system.

In my case I've never not been political, though religion tended to overshadow it in my acid days; that would be around '65 or '66. And that religion was directly the result of all that superstar shit—religion was an outlet for my repression.

Even during the Beatle heyday I tried to go against the system, so did George. We went to America a few times and Epstein always tried to waffle on at us about saying nothing about Vietnam. So there came a time when George and I said 'Listen, when they ask next time, we're going to say we don't like that war and we think they should get right out.' That's what we did. At that time this was a pretty radical thing to do, especially for the 'Fab Four'. It was the first opportunity I personally took to wave the flag a bit.

'Revolution' . There were two versions of that song but the underground left only picked up on the one that said 'count me out'. The original version which ends up on the LP said 'count me in' too; I put in both because I wasn't sure. There was a third version that was just abstract, musique concrete, kind of loops and that, people screaming. I thought I was painting in sound a picture of revolution—but I made a mistake, you know. The mistake was that it was anti-revolution.

On the version released as a single I said 'when you talk about destruction you can count me out'. I didn't want to get killed. I didn't really know that much about the Maoists, but I just knew that they seemed to be so few and yet they painted themselves green and stood in front of the police waiting to get picked off. I just thought it was unsubtle, you know. I thought the original Communist revolutionaries coordinated themselves a bit better and didn't go around shouting about it. That was how I felt—I was really asking a question. As someone from the working class I was always interested in Russia and China and everything that related to the working class, even though I was playing the capitalist game.

What I'm trying to do is to influence all the people I can influence. All those who are still under the dream and just put a big question mark in their mind. The acid dream is over, that is what I'm trying to tell them.

When I started, rock and roll itself was the basic revolution to people of my age and situation. We needed something loud and clear to break through all the unfeeling and repression that had been coming down on us kids. We were a bit conscious to begin with of being imitation Americans. But we delved into the music and found that it was half white country and western and half black rhythm and blues. Most of the songs came from Europe and Africa and now they were coming back to us. Many of Dylan's best songs came from Scotland, Ireland or England. It was a sort of cultural exchange.

Though I must say the more interesting songs to me were the black ones because they were more simple. They sort of said-shake your arse, or your prick, which was an innovation really. And then there were the field songs mainly expressing the pain they were in. They couldn't express themselves intellectually so they had to say in a very few words what was happening to them. And then there was the city blues and a lot of that was about sex and fighting.

A lot of this was self-expression but only in the last few years have they expressed themselves completely with Black Power, like Edwin Starr making war records. Before that many black singers were still labouring under that problem of God; it was often 'God will save us'. But right through the blacks were singing directly and immediately about their pain and also about sex, which is why I like it.CP

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(**Bush** *continued from page 1)*
to fully emerge from its own collapse of 15 years ago."

Bob adds that "Back in the 1850s, Karl Marx observed that speculative markets ballooned and collapsed in 7 - 10 year cycles. In considering the history of capitalism from the late 18th century onward, it's remarkable how penetrating Marx was in this observation. The only time this basic pattern has not held true was over the 1950s - 1970s, the period when financial markets were most heavily controlled by government regulations."

On another front, General Motors darkened Thanksgiving by announcing shutdown of 12 plants with a loss of 30,000 jobs. Imagine what it's like to turn on the tv news in Springhill in middle Tennessee and hear that 5,576 jobs are scheduled to go out the window. So much for being a Right to Work state, same as Georgia, where GM is closing the Doraville plant (3,076 jobs gone) or Oklahoma, which is losing the Oklahoma City plant that employs 2,734. The city of Flint reels yet again. GM says it will close Factory 36 there, where 735 workers turned out engines.

Ford is about to follow suit with more than 30,000 layoffs involving the closing of ten plants.

On our CounterPunch website, Paul Craig Roberts, former assistant secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan years, derides Bush administration's cheers for the November employment figures. Roberts: "Spinmeisters made the most out of the 215,000 jobs. Looking beyond the glitter at the real facts, this is what we see. 21,000 of those jobs were government jobs supported by taxpayers. There were only 194,000 new jobs in the private sector. Of those new jobs, 37,000 are in construction and only 11,000 are in manufacturing. The bulk of the new jobs – 144,000 – are in domestic services.

"Wholesale and retail trade account for 20,000. Food services and drinking places (waitresses and bar tenders) account for 38,000. Health care and social assistance account for 27,000. Professional and business services account for 29,000. Financial activities gained 13,000 jobs. Transportation and warehousing gained 8,000 jobs.

"Very few of these jobs result in tradable services that can be exported or help to close the growing gap in the U.S. balance of trade.

"The 11,000 new factory jobs and the 15,000 of the previous month are a relief from the usual loss. However, these gains are more than offset by the job cuts recently announced by General Motors and Ford.

"Despite the gain in jobs, total hours worked declined as the average workweek fell to 33.7 hours. The decline in the labor force participation rate, a consequence of the shrinkage in well-paying jobs, masks a higher rate of unemployment than the reported 5 per cent. The ratio of employment to population fell again in November.

"Average hourly earnings (up 3.2 per cent over the last year) are not keeping up with the consumer price index (up 4.3 per cent). Consequently, real incomes are falling."

Forbes magazine outlined its plan for boosting the economy: "Ten reasons why you should drink through the holidays."

PNC Financial Services' inflation index linked to "The Twelve Days of Christmas" shows that this year the overall cost of all the twelve gifts has risen by 6 per cent, with gold rings leading the way, up 27.5 per cent. Pear trees are up 15.4 per cent After holding steady for two decades at $150 for six geese-a-laying, the price tag has doubled to $300. What about those ten lords-aleaping Steady at $4,039.08. Eight maids-asmiling (cost $41.20) also held steady, as did drummers and pipers. But the price of nine ladies dancing has gone up by 4 per cent, to $4,576.14.

Fear and Trembling in GOP

On the Hill, Republicans are increasingly open in their efforts to distance themselves from a man they fear will drag them all down next year. Senator majority leader Bill Frist, battered by charges of insider trading, expressed his defiance of the White House by endorsing McCain's anti-torture amendment which (given wings by vice president Cheney's furious attack on it) surged to victory by 90 to 9.

The silver lining for Bush has come in the form of the Democrats.

The November 17 onslaught by Democratic Rep. John Murtha on the war in Iraq could have been the occasion for a dazzling counter-attack on Bush by a party whose performance on an unpopular war has been timid and confused or, in the case of Senator Joseph Lieberman, actively complicit. Murtha, a former U.S. Marine and for many years head of the U.S. Armed Services Committee, has the credentials, plus devastating factual input from four-star generals who see the war as destroying the U.S. Army.

For those who watched it on CNN, Murtha's onslaught was savage. It so unnerved the White House that from the president's party, touring the Far East, came a ludicrous equating of Murtha with Michael Moore, a gibe that Murtha effortlessly brushed aside by citing Cheney's five deferments in the Vietnam era.

Yet the Democrats' first instinct was to flee Murtha and actively undercut him.

The Democrats' house leader, Nancy Pelosi, had pledged Murtha that after his news conference she would hold a press conference to endorse his call for immediate withdrawal. But instead, after getting warning phone calls from Senate Democrats like Biden, Clinton, Dodd and Feinstein, Pelosi canceled her press conference and hung Murtha out to dry. That same day Kerry went on the Chris Matthews' show, Hardball, and called Murtha "misguided". Senator Russ Feingold, the purported anti-war candidate, put out a statement announcing that he had a better plan, setting withdrawal at a considerably slower pace than Murtha.

Scenting weakness, the Republicans offered a put-up-or-shut-up resolution calling for immediate withdrawal. The leadership of the Democrats convened a caucus, denounced "a set-up" and then agreed to vote against the withdrawal resolution. Only three Democrats in the House, McKinney, Serrano and Wexler, voted for withdrawal. Having thus blunted Murtha's powerful onslaught, the Democrats milled about in confusion until Senator Joe Lieberman returned from a trip to Iraq and promptly published an article in the *Wall Street Journal* saying Murtha had painted far too dark a picture and that Bush needed to counter-attack and tout the victories that were being won on the ground.

The President seized on this advice and launched on a series of speeches announcing that victory was at hand.

Then Pelosi went home for the Thanksgiving recess and ran into furious criticism from her constituents. She returned to Washington and finally endorsed Murtha's position. Two days later, Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, said the war was unwinnable and called for an Exit strategy. Once again, the Senate Democrats distanced themselves and began to give background quotes to the *Washington Post* , saying that Pelosi and Dean would destroy the party's chances in 2006.

Where were Kucinich, DiFazio, Na-

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dler, Kaptur and the other progressives? Nowhere to Be heard. The brightest spark remained Murtha, who took the occasion of Bush's second "victory" speech to launch another eloquent factual onslaught.

Corruption Cuts Both Ways

Another albatross around the neck of the Republican Party comes in the form of corruption. The most powerful Republican in Washington was, until his indictment by a Texas DA, Tom DeLay, erstwhile House majority leader. Now he faces charges of money laundering to detour campaign spending limits and restrictions. Also looming over DeLay is the Ambramoff scandal, in which federal prosecutors are closing in on one of the ripest influence peddlers in Washington.

Abramoff's number two, Michael Scanlon (a former legislative aide to DeLay) has just agreed to testify against his former boss, and possibly against the politicians they suborned.

The Abramoff scandal displays Washington at its rankest, which is precisely why the Democrats cannot take full advantage, since the corruption is bipartisan. Among the leading recipients of Abramoff's favors proffered in exchange for votes on relevant legislation) are Senate Minority leader Harry Reid, former senate majority leader Tom Daschle, and the man who is heading the investigation of Abramoff by Democrats in the Senate, Byron Dorgan of North Dakota,

As ranking Democrat on the Indian Affairs subcommittee, Dorgan is at the cross roads of influence peddling on casino franchises and the status of Indian groups relevant to getting casino licenses. As a prime legislative gatekeeper in a game with huge stakes, Dorgan accepted favors from Abramoff and apparently performed the requisite legislative services in return.

As for DeLay's money laundering, here too the Democrats have a problem. The FBI recently raided the offices of Geoffrey Fieger, a famous trial lawyer in Michigan after a former associate of Fieger said that he and his wife were both nudged into giving $2,000 to the Edwards for Veep campaign in 2004, and were then reimbursed by Fieger. The investigators are probing allegations that there may have been a larger scheme by the Trial Lawyers to bundle money for Edwards beyond the permitted limits for contributions. Fieger says he's the victim of a political vendetta. This may well be true but the fact remains that the Democrats are just as vulnerable to such probes as the Republicans.

Woodward's Hypocrisy

The strategy of the senior Democrats, meekly accepted by almost the entire congressional delegation, is to keep quiet and let the Republicans hang themselves. The problem with this is two-fold . The voters don't like politicians who offer substantive alternative to the existing mess, and the tactic is self-perpetuating. You get the habit of staying quiet on everything, hoping that some other institution, like the Fourth Estate, will do the job for you.

Now the corporate press has certainly turned against Bush, to an extent often underappreciated on the left. Cindy Sheehan got plenty of airtime, keeping her vigil outside Crawford alive through the late summer. The corporate press has been ruthless about the White House's performance in hurricane season. Murtha has been getting decent play.

What Murtha and the Army are saying is that speedy withdrawal is not an option, it's a necessity.

But in the Plame affair the press has often ended up looking compromised, just like the Democrats in the Abramoff scandal. The year has been profuse with examples of just how corrupted the Fourth Estate has become. Judith Miller of the *New York Times* behaved like a political operator, not a political reporter. Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* was the first to get the Plame story, but he missed its significance, didn't tell his editors about his contacts with the Administration on this matter, stayed silent as his colleagues were being hauled before the grand jury, hung his colleague Walter Pincus out to dry and publicly belittled the scandal on TV almost to the point of appearing to be sending a message to Prosecutor Fitzgerald not to bring indictments. Woodward's hypocrisy was so manifest that he even managed to outrage Larry King.

Why Rove Escaped Indictment

Perhaps the biggest mystery remains why Karl Rove, Bush's chief political adviser, was not indicted alongside Scooter Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, since we now know Rove was the person who told Matt Cooper of *Time* that Joe Wilson's wife worked for the CIA. It turns out Rove was saved from indictment by *Time* reporter Viveca Novak (no relation of Robert Novak, aka the Prince of Darkness). Ms. Novak enjoyed a cozy relationship with Robert Luskin, Rove's lawyer. Not long before Libby's indictment, as they sat enjoying a bottle of wine at Café Deluxe up Wisconsin Avenue, not far from the National Cathedral, Luskin told her that "Karl doesn't have a Cooper problem. He wasn't a source for Matt." Ms. Novak replied, "Are you sure about that? That's not what I hear around *Time*."

Thus did Ms. Novak disclose a fact of extraordinary interest to a lawyer as sharp as Luskin who had apparently been misled by his client as much as had the Grand Jury, to whom Rove proclaimed in ringing tones in the fall of 2004 that he had not leaked the professional identity of Wilson's wife.

Following Ms. Novak's indiscretion Luskin cut short their conversation, walked her to her car, told her "Thank you, this is important." He then scrutinized all Rove's email traffic and eventually found a communication between Rove and Stephen Hadley at the National Security Council, making it clear that yes, despite his sworn testimony, Rove had talked to Cooper and disclosed Plame's trade.

Luskin then took his client back to Fitzgerald's office and had him tell the prosecutor that he had forgotten his exchange with Cooper a year earlier. It seems apparent Fitzgerald had that same email and would have been able to hit Rove with a perjury charge. Indeed, he might have been about to do so until Luskin was able to persuade him that Rove's forgetfulness was genuine and that as soon as Ms. Novak had reminded them of the contact, they had promptly told the prosecutor. It turns out that like Miller and Woodward, Novak had not informed her editors of her sessions with Luskin and, in fact, was in the midst of writing about Woodward's ethical lapses, when she got a call from her lawyer saying that Fitzgerald was going to subpoena her.

Ms. Novak ended her account in *Time* with the indignant cry of the wounded insider, "Luskin is unhappy that I decided

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to write about our conversation, but I feel that he violated any understanding to keep our talk confidential by unilaterally going to Fitzgerald and telling him what was said."

What the Press Missed in Iraq

For a lesson in just how bad the U.S. press has been in reporting the actual course of the war in Iraq, consider Murtha's two press conferences. Many of his points, such as that soldiers in U.S. convoy lack walkie-talkies, are the sort of material that energetic war correspondents used to root out. Not any more, it seems. GAO reports highlighting such critical shortages get scant coverage. Here are the main points Murtha made after Bush's second Victory-is-at-hand speech.

Once again, as with his November 17 blast, Murtha relayed what the four star generals are telling him. Among his disclosures:

Logistical planning and supplies for U.S. forces has all but disintegrated. Murtha: "We had National Guard security people without radios – couldn't talk to the front, the back of the convoy, endangering their lives... Forty thousand troops didn't have body armor."

Substandard recruitment and poor training have produced an army incapable of fighting or even defending itself effectively. Murtha: "We have 112,000 shortages in critical MOS specialties, that's a military specialist. Now, what are those shortages? Number one, they're in demolition experts; number two, special forces people; number three, intelligence experts, which are absolutely essential; and fourth is translators. Now could there be any more important specialties than that? And we're short in every one of those fields."

The Army's manpower crisis has resulted in unsustainable budgetary outlays. Murtha: "They are now paying $150,000 for somebody that's in special forces, in one of the specialties, in order to get them to re-enlist. They missed their goal. And one of the biggest reasons that I'm so concerned about this – and I talk to the military all the time – is the future of the military. They missed their goal in recruiting by 6,600 this last time."

The political impossibility of reviving the draft has produced an army overloaded with substandard recruits. Murtha: "They're accepting 20 per cent last year in category four. Now, this is a highly technical service we're dealing with. And yet they lowered the standards to category four, which they said when we had the volunteer army, that would eliminate all the category four."

Venturing on ground normally shunned by his fellow Democrats, Murtha derided Bush's description of resistance in Iraq as terrorism. He insisted it is an insurgency, powered by the U.S. military presence and by U.S. tactics. Murtha: "For instance, in Fallujah, which happened about the same time – the first Fallujah happened about the same time as Abu Ghraib – we put 150,000 people outside their homes in Fallujah. If you remember in Jordan, the bomber said that the reason she became a bomber was because two of her relatives were killed in Fallujah. We lost the hearts and minds of the people."

Murtha dismissed the claims of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld that the resistance in Iraq comes primarily or even substantively from outside the country. Murtha: "We [i.e., U.S. intelligence estimates inside Iraq] think that foreign fighters are about 7 per cent , might be a little bit more, a little bit less. Very small proportion of the people that are involved in the insurgency are terrorists or how I would interpret them as terrorists."

Murtha reiterated the view he put forward at his first bombshell news conference on November 17 that withdrawal on an accelerated schedule is a certainty and one that will entail continuing heavy casualties . Though he did not characterize it as such, Murtha is predicting a bloody rout for U.S. forces, to which there is no alternative. Murtha: "They're going to withdraw. There's no question they're going to withdraw. I predict a big proportion of the troops will be out by next year. But the problem is they're just as vulnerable. The biggest vulnerability we have in Iraq is the convoys. Every convoy is attacked. When I was in Anbar, at Haditha, every single convoy was attacked that goes there to bring the logistics and supplies that they need. That's the most vulnerable part of our deployment. And if you have half the troops there, you're going to still have to supply them, resupply them on the ground, and they're going to be attacked. When I said we can't win a military victory, it's because the Iraqis have turned against us."

What Murtha and the Army are saying is that speedy withdrawal is not an option, it's a necessity. Somebody knocks you down in the street and kicks you, you don't announce a schedule of withdrawal from the sidewalk a year hence. You drag yourself off as best you can.

Why the Generals Are Panicking

Former Pentagon budget analyst and CounterPuncher Chuck Spinney (who was once featured on the cover of Time magazine on account of his brilliant dissection of what porkbarreling was doing to the US military) sets Murtha's speeches in a useful larger perspective: "Murtha is dead right so far as it goes, but there is another thing Murtha is being told the generals ... namely that the cost of the war is causing unbearable increases in the operating budget (perfectly predictable — what I have called the rising cost of low readiness) and is putting enormous pressure on the modernization budget (procurement & R&D). If this war can not be ratcheted back soon, thereby permitting the porkers to cut back operating costs by reducing tempo and shrinking the force (again!!), deep, savage, and arbitrary cuts will have to be made to the contractors' programs (F-22, Joint Strike Fighter, Future Combat Systems, Ballistic Missile Defense, DDX Navy Destroyers, etc.). This is exactly what I said would happen in a variety of papers I wrote in 1980s and 1990s, including the strategic review article — the Iraq war has simply magnified and accelerated the inevitable outcome of these pressures.

"The know nothings in the Pentagon, Congress, and the defense industry want to continue business as usual by shoveling money to the contractors. Their lust and greed are major pressures for pulling out of Iraq."

Operation Iraqi Break-Up

We go to press on the eve of the assembly elections in Iraq, but the trend is clear. As Patrick Cockburn reports from Baghdad:

"Iraq is disintegrating as a united state. The election for the National Assembly may mark the point of no return. 'A Bosnian solution to the Iraq crisis is now on the agenda,' says Ghassan Attiyah, a veteran Iraqi commentator. The election is decisive because the Shia and Sunni Arabs and the Kurds - the three main Iraqi communities - show every sign of voting along ethnic and religious lines. Secular and nationalist groups looking for support beyond their own community have their backs to the wall.

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"The US and Britain have presented so many events in Iraq over the past two-and-a-half years as spurious turning points for the better that the critical importance of the election for the 275-member national assembly on Thursday is being underestimated outside Iraq. The old unitary Iraqi state created by Britain after the First World War may be passing away.

"The verdict is not quite in. There are forces for unity as well as for disintegration. But since the fall of Saddam Hussein, it is the latter forces which have proved to be the stronger. Iraqis are beginning to talk about partition as a likely outcome of the crisis. This has already happened in Kurdistan. The Kurds, a fifth of Iraq's 26 million population, already have quasi-independence, with their own government and armed forces. An Iraqi Arab has difficulty getting a hotel room in Arbil, the Kurdish capital.

"Iraqi Arab leaders largely accept what has happened in Kurdistan, if only because there is nothing they can do about it. Adnan Pachachi, a former foreign minister and nationalist, said: 'Everybody recognises that the Kurds can have their separate state. There is no difference of opinion on that.'

"Mr Pachachi says the real threat to Iraq is that the Shia in southern Iraq may create their own super-canton. Iraqi Shia and Kurds voted for this overwhelmingly when they approved the new federal constitution in a referendum on 15 October. Abdul Aziz Hakim, the leader of the most powerful Shia party - the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri) - is intent on creating a Shia super-region, with most of the powers of an independent state, in the nine Shia provinces. This is half of Iraq's 18 provinces. A further four provinces are effectively controlled by the Kurds, leaving only a rump of five provinces patchily under the control of the government in Baghdad.

"'Central government could end up being a few buildings in the Green Zone', said an Iraqi minister. 'The US and Britain are working desperately to stop it.' He pointed out that the Kurdish government had recently signed a contract with a Norwegian oil company to drill for oil. Under the new constitution the Kurdish and Shia super-regions will own new oil reserves when they are discovered. This will give them economic independence.

"All the institutions of the state are becoming fiefdoms of one community or another. When Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the prime minister, took power all previous employees of his office were fired. Bayan Jabr, the interior minister from Sciri, has been turning his ministry, which has 110,000 men under arms, into a Shia stronghold. Sunni military units have been dissolved. The Badr Organisation, the militia of Sciri, has infiltrated the paramilitary police commandos whom the Sunni see as licensed death squads.

"Badr is not the only militia growing in strength. If they control the police commandos then the Mehdi Army militia of Muqtada al-Sadr has much of the police force in Baghdad. The US has tried to keep control over the defence ministry but army battalions are Shia, Sunni or Kurdish. Out of 115 battalions reportedly only one is mixed.

"The ability of the US and Britain to determine the fate of Iraq is growing less by the month. The US is trying to reach out to countries such as Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which it was ignoring two years ago. There is no more talk of changing the Middle East. British troops have largely withdrawn to their bases around Basra. The Sunni will take part in the election but will continue to try to end the occupation.

"Iraq will still remain a name on the map. Baghdad will be difficult to divide, though it is largely a Shia city. Most Iraqi Arabs say they would like to be part of a single country. But the most likely future is for Iraq to become a loose confederation."

Kolko Was Right

Last year Gabriel Kolko wrote here that if the desired end is a weakening of the US Empire, then George Bush was the man to vote for. He was right. On Bush's watch it looks as though a significant portion of the world's oil reserves will come under the control of Iraq's Shia, who have strong politic-religious ties to Iran, which already sells 15 per cent of its oil to China. This is not a development relished by Saudi Arabia's ruling dynasty, which has its own Shia problem. Thank you, George.CP

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